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RUEHJO/AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG 0555
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001133

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR CA/FPP AND AF/S B. WALCH
DEPT PLEASE PASS TO KCC
JOHANNESBURG FOR RCO MICHAEL VEASY

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [CMGT](#) [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [KFRD](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE PASSPORT REGISTRAR IN DENIAL

REF: HARARE 000996

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11. (U) SUMMARY: In a meeting on December 16, Zimbabwe Registrar General Tobaiwa Mudede denied the existence of any problems with Zimbabwean passport controls. Instead, he boasted of Zimbabwean passport security features that insured individual identity, and blamed Zimbabwe's excessive passport processing time on the failure of applicants to check on their applications. Mudede's remarks come on the heels of a three-fold increase in Zimbabwe passport fees, a processing time measured in years, and confirmation by Post of compromised Zimbabwe blank passports. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) As the Registrar General, Tobaiwa Mudede is in charge of Zimbabwe passports and voter registration. In a meeting with Conoff to discuss Zimbabwean passport security features that was three months in the making, Mudede boasted how Zimbabwe had led the region in incorporating machine-readable passports that included a fingerprint image on the bio page. Accompanied by his passport policy expert, passport technical expert, and a host of MFA onlookers, Mudede refused to discuss any security features unique to Zimbabwean passports. Instead, he attempted to assuage concerns by anecdotally comparing the uniqueness of Zimbabwean passport security features to zebra stripes.

13. (SBU) With attempts to discuss security features thwarted, Conoff inquired about Zimbabwe passport controls and processes, and presented Mudede with evidence that strongly suggested a compromise in the security of Zimbabwe passport supplies. Mudede responded that if true, such a situation represented a world-wide criminal problem, and was a matter for the police. He demanded that all suspect passports be turned over to the Registrar General's office immediately so the holders could be thrown in jail. When asked about the Zimbabwe passport process and the extended backlog in applications, Mudede blamed the applicants themselves for the backlog, saying they presented "problem" applications in which the personal data could not be verified. He went on to say that his office did not have the time to write to every "problem" applicant for verification of personal data, but instead waited for applicants to return to the Registrar's office to check on their applications. He attributed the Zimbabwe passport backlog to the failure of applicants to check on their applications in a timely manner.

14. (SBU) As reported reftel, corruption has become endemic within the Zimbabwean civil service, resulting in a near total collapse of government controls over passports and official documents. Civil servants, whose salaries have been eroded to practically nothing by hyper-inflation, have become not only susceptible, but dependent on bribes and kickbacks for basic subsistence. On December 11, citing escalating costs, the Registrar General's office raised passport fees 300 percent, resulting in a fee of USD 650 for an urgent (expedited) adult passport. Although the fee for normal processing

was only raised to USD 120, our sources involved in the Zimbabwe passport process report that only expedited applications are being processed and that only U.S. dollars are being accepted for payment.

This dramatic increase in cost will most certainly add to the popularity of alternative passport services, and further fuel a flourishing industry of fraudulent document vendors.

15. (SBU) In the latest example of passport fraud seen at Post, an alert FSN recognized a suspect Zimbabwean passport during NIV intake, and immediately notified the Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU). The FSN's suspicion was raised due to a lighter than normal background printing on the bio page. Upon examination, we determined the passport was printed from an authentic blank (book), but was obviously fraudulent. The bio page had a sealed film that was a crude attempt to mimic the glossy appearance of authentic passports, and the passport lacked the fidelity found in the background printing of authentic passports. In addition, the fingerprint image included on the bio page obviously did not match the prints taken during the subject's NIV interview.

16. (SBU) Upon investigation by the FPU and ARSO, the passport was found to have been obtained through a Harare "agent" in 2006, and was used to travel from the U.S. to Zimbabwe in December of 2008. In December 2004, the subject had received an F1 visa to study in the U.S., and was in school when her passport expired in 2007. Unable to obtain a new passport through the Zimbabwe Embassy in DC, she asked her mother for help.

17. (SBU) The mother told us she was frustrated in her attempts to apply for her daughter at the Registrar General, and mentioned her dilemma to an agent that had previously helped her with a South African visa. She said she paid the agent a USD 200 brokerage fee, received the passport a few days later, and then mailed it to her daughter in the U.S. The daughter was applying to renew her F1 visa when the fraudulent passport was discovered at Post.

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18. (SBU) COMMENT: Passports for Zimbabweans have become more than just travel documents. They represent an opportunity to obtain food, medical care, and subsistence that has become unavailable in Zimbabwe. The state of denial exhibited by the Registrar General is all too familiar. While average Zimbabweans struggle with multiple examples of a failed government and a cholera outbreak that was unimaginable just a few years ago, Zimbabwe's leadership refuses to acknowledge the situation. We anticipate the demand for Zimbabwe passports to increase, with a growing percentage of this demand supplied by fraudulent document agents. END COMMENT.

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